

500 S. Wightman
2636

The Sin and Shame of disregarding
alarming Providences.

A

S E R M O N

PREACHED AT

CROSBY-SQUARE,

April 4, 1750.

Occasioned by two SHOCKS of an

EARTHQUAKE;

One on *February 8.* the other on *March 8.*

By THOMAS NEWMAN.

L O N D O N:

Printed for R. HETT, at the *Bible and Crown* in the
Poultry; and J. WAUGH, at the *Turk's Head* in
Lombard-Street. MDCC L.

[Price Six-Pence.]

1468



THE HISTORY OF
CHINA

BY JAMES MILLER



ISAIAH V. 12.

The harp and the viol, the tabret and pipe, and wine are in their feasts; but they regard not the work of the Lord, nor the operation of his hands.

TH E S E words are a description of the generality of the *Jewish* nation, and contain an heavy charge exhibited against them. A people they were, to whom God had in a most signal and sensible manner too displayed himself, making bare his arm in wonders both of judgment and mercy in such a manner, that they could not ascribe the events to any other cause; but both they and their enemies were constrained to acknowledge, that they were the immediate works of his finger, and the operation of his hand. But alas! how inconsistent herewith is the character here given of them! viz. that they regarded not the work of the Lord, nor considered the operation of his hand. How was it possible! how could

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they avoid it ! when they were so *immediately* under the government of God, when it was as manifest that it was *he*, even that it was *he*, that did what their eyes beheld, as that it was done. How could they help regarding his hand, when it was as evident as it could have been, had he assumed a *visible* form ! This may appear strange, if not unaccountable, at first sight : but not when we consider the character or description of this people subjoined to the charge brought against them : And that was, that they were given up to sensual and sensitive pleasures : they followed *the harp and the viol, the tabret, the pipe, and the wine*: they dwelt in the house of mirth and madness ; their minds were so set upon, and swallowed up with their diversions and the gratification of their senses, that they had no reason nor thought, no heart nor inclination, left for any thing above them, however alarming or engaging, however obvious or important, or how much soever their own interest and safety was concerned in it.

THOSE who see, as every one that hath eyes may, what work a love and life of pleasure makes *at this day* ; how low it sinks the mind, how near to the brute it brings the taste ; how blind and insensible it renders its votaries to the most plain and concerning things, and how great an aversion it introduces to every thing deserving the name of *thought* and *reflection*—I say, whoever observes what is almost every where glaring amongst ourselves, will cease to wonder at the charge brought in the Text against the *Jews*,
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that they regarded not the works of the divine hand, but as the Prophet expresses it, *dwell carelessly*, or laid nothing to heart, whilst they were given to pleasure *. But though it be not thought strange it must be accounted monstrous and scandalously criminal by every one who considers, and to merit the solemn woe denounced in the preceding verse against it. And wherever the mind is thus abandoned to and intoxicated by pleasure, it will be accompanied with a contemptuous disregard of all that is truly great and good, however solemn and concerning it be.

THAT I may render these words useful to ourselves, which are too just a description of us, I would

I. REPRESENT to you what these works of the Lord, and the operations of his hand are to which the text refers.

II. WHEREIN the crime and guilt of the charge respecting these works consist, which is expressed by, *not regarding nor considering them.*

III. I WOULD offer some particulars for the justifying that brand and woe, which such a behaviour lies under.

I. LET us attend a little to those works of the Lord, and those operations of his hand which the text speaks of. As he is the creator of the universe every thing that exists may be so termed. When we lift our eyes to the glorious lights

* Isaiah xlviij. 8.

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lights of Heaven, and ask ourselves that most natural question, *who hath created all these things?* whose workmanship are they? Scripture directs us, and our reason at once falls in therewith, to give this as the only *satisfactory* answer, *all these things bath God's hand made* *. Their exquisite beauty, usefulness, order, and grandeur, declare they could have no other author, former, or cause, but himself.

BUT I think these are not the works of the Lord which the text refers to: they are not those of creation, but of *providence*; and more especially his dispensations towards the children of men, both in a way of mercy and correction. The doctrine of providence may be very strongly urged from that of creation: nor is it enough to acknowledge such a providence as upholds and maintains the general frame and course of nature; but it is also requisite to grant, what I think is equally evident, that there is a *particular* direction and disposal of all causes and events: or as our Saviour hath taught us, that *nothing comes to pass without our heavenly father* †. An every where present, an every where active, designing, mind, being once allowed; and the beings, the powers, and operations of all creatures once acknowledged dependant upon him, and under his influence, we are led to conceive of all *particular* events in the material world, as the works of the Lord and the operations of his hand: since it is a certain

* *Isaiah lxvi. 2.*

† *Mat. x. 29.*

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tain consequence from that acknowledgment, that all other causes are but *instruments or means under him*. He gave those causes their force, he imparted their qualities, he knows what productions can arise from them, they are really the effects of his commission, and, properly speaking, are *his own works*. It is true, some of those effects carry more evidence of their being so than others. The dispensations which the texts speaks of, respecting the *Jewish nation*, displayed much more of the *immediate hand and finger of God*, than most in the course of providence at this day. He being in a special manner their king and governor, and giving them very particular accounts of what he *would do* both in a way of mercy and judgment before he proceeded, and of the several revolutions in their circumstances; so when those events exactly corresponded to the prediction, they carried the divine favour or frown in their very front; nor could they possibly doubt whose acts and works they were, or ascribe them to any other cause. These are the works that the text refers to, particularly those of a judicial kind. And this directs our thoughts to the dispensations of providence towards ourselves, both national and personal; which though they carry not that evidence to our *senses* of their being the finger of God, as those towards the *Jews* did, yet they proclaim themselves to be so to our *reason*, especially as aided by revelation. Some of the dispensations in our day carry stronger impressions of a divine agency, and appear to us more evidently

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dently to be the divine operation, than others : but since we are assured that *every good and perfect gift cometh down from the father of lights*, by whatever means conveyed to us ; and that *there is no evil in a city but the Lord hath done it*, whoever or whatever were the immediate causes ; so it is strictly true, that there is as real an efficiency, as actual an exertion of the divine will and power in respect of events in general, as if there was no establishment and order in second causes : and though in what we call *extraordinary* interpositions, the divine influence and agency may be more *conspicuous to us*, yet they are not more *certainly interested* in those events than in what are more common ; nor are those extraordinary acts *in reality* more the work of the Lord, than those in which his finger is less discernible. But as men are lulled into a dulness and sleepy inadvertency under the more *even and stated* course of things, so God sometimes orders those dispensations both of mercy and judgment, which carry in them the *special* evidences of his appointment and operation, to awaken the attention and reflection of mankind, and to constrain them to see and say, “ verily there is a God that ruleth and judgeth “ in the earth.” This brings me

II. To consider what this charge of *not regarding* the works of the Lord, and of *not considering* the operation of his hands, implies, or of what it consists. And it seems to include three things : viz. the taking no notice of the divine acts.

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acts—a regardlessness of the hand of God in them—and the taking no care to answer the end of his dispensations.

I. THIS charge against the Jews implies, the taking *no notice* of the divine dispensations themselves. The words might be read, they *behold not* the works of the Lord, nor *see* the operation of his hand. The dispensations referred to were those of a penal or judicial kind: which are most apt to strike and arrest the mind. They were actually under some, and more were impending and hanging over them; but they attended to neither: They seemed not to perceive what was done before their eyes. Our own times furnish us with abundant evidence, that a sensual and intemperate life will introduce a strange insensibility, and render us blind to, and stupid under, what is most apparent and alarming: Judgments themselves, carrying in them considerable evil, and presaging more, are hardly so much as noticed, when and as long as people can indulge to appetite, and ply their diversions. This takes away the heart and mind, engrosses the attention, so that there is none left for the works of God, or the dispensations of providence. These things are far above their sight. The character of *Ephraim* as a people is too much a personal one, *Strangers have devoured*, or they are devouring, *his strength*, and *he knoweth it not*; *grey hairs are here and there upon him*, yet *he knoweth it not**. The obvious meaning of which is this, "that they

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* Hosea vii. 9.

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were under the most evident symptoms of decay, of an approaching dissolution and destruction, as grey hairs are the ordinary tokens of the abatement of natural strength, and that it is drawing to a period, yet they understood it not, they had no more sense of it than if no such signs were upon them." How true is this of multitudes in our time, when the most awaking dispensations are in our own land, carrying desolation and destruction in their very nature! How few see them so as to *regard* them, to be seriously affected by them, or derive any suitable impressions from them! And surely a reasonable creature can never be allowed to *see* any thing, immediately respecting his interest, unless he *attend* to it; nor to *take notice* of what is affecting, unless he so far lay it to heart as to be *affected by it* †.

2. THIS charge imports, a *regardlessness of the hand of God* in those dispensations. If they took notice of them as *facts*, or made them the subject of their speculation, yet not as *the works of God*, nor did they consider them as *his doing*: Their eye terminated in the event; they looked no further: They did not, as they should, resolve things into their proper principles; their minds never rose to their original and author, which was no other than God himself. From hence, whatever observations they made of them were trifling; whatever notice they took of them was absolutely worthless, since they left out what was *principally* to be considered in the events,

† Isaiah xlvi. 20.

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events, which was the divine agency and design in them, or as the hand of God was concerned therein, and displayed thereby. Alas! How much do *we* resemble *them*! When sickness and death become epidemical, how few rise higher in their thoughts than infectious air, or unfriendly seasons! Forgetting who appoints, who changeth the seasons; who holdeth our souls in life; who taketh away our breath, and orders death to go through a land. When we feel the earth trembling under us, and ready to swallow us up; our habitations shaking and sinking under us, the sides threatening to enclose us, and the arched roof tumbling in to crush us—under these circumstances, I say, if we can but prattle a little upon subterraneous caverns, upon vapours, exhalations, fermentations, &c. we imagine we are got as far as we need to go, and sit down abundantly satisfied with our own speculations: While at the same time, that it is God *who shaketh the earth out of her place, and maketh the pillars thereof to tremble*; that it is He *who removeth the mountains, and overturneth them in his anger*, is as great and evident a truth as that he doth exist *. But, alas! If we can but find out a *second cause*, that shall have the honours due to the *first*: If we are but able to point to some *visible* cause (and when may we not do it) how generally doth it swallow up all sense of the *invisible* director and disposer! Not only is he excluded our schemes, not only are they formed without interesting him in them in any

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degree,

* Job ix. 5, 6.

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degree, but he is not admitted to have any scheme of his own, or to exercise any government, as long as we are able to alledge any immediate cause of an event. Thus would vain man affect to be wise : And either from the pride or terrors of his heart would he confine his views to matter and motion, concealing from *himself* what his own natural sentiments suggest, and denying by a disregard what is many times as *obvious*, always as *certain*, as the event, that it is the operation of the divine hand, and the effect of the divine power.

3. THIS charge against the Jews implies, the taking no care *to answer the end* of the divine dispensations. The text plainly intimates, that they came upon a plain and particular errand, which they might easily have understood, would they but have attended to the dictates of their own minds as to the language of providence. But they behaved under them as if they had been wholly void of design, or as if the Jews had been incapable of discerning it. *Continuing* what they were, was the fullest proof they regarded not what was done : And persisting in their prosecution of their pleasures, was an indisputable testimony they considered not the operation of the divine hand. Though many of the ends which providences may be ordained to subserve are, and must be, a secret to us, from the extensive views of the divine wisdom, yet those with which we have the nearest concern are evident : What their language to us is, our own minds, were they impartially exercised and

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consulted, would inform us. It is blasphemy, and the highest reflection in thought, to look on such events as we have lately seen, as the *sports of the divine power*; or as if they were intended merely to shew us what God could do; just to surprize, alarm us, to make us stare, or to furnish us with matter of speculation. No: We are sure they are the effects of as perfect wisdom as power, and come upon a design most worthy of him, *who is wise in heart as mighty in strength*. They carry destruction in their very aspect and nature; and if we may judge of the reasons of the divine proceedings from the characters given of those cities and people who have been set forth as the *examples* of the divine justice, we are fully assured, it was for the *wickedness of those who dwelt therein*, and because the inhabitants thereof were *very great sinners before the Lord*. What then can be the *design* of such extraordinary judgments, or even the *beginnings* or tokens of such sorrows? But to awaken an awe of that great, that mighty, that terrible God, who designs to make himself known by the judgments that he executeth upon a land or city, *for the wickedness of those who dwell therein*: And that those who behold his works should hear, and fear, and do no more presumptuously. Upon this its end, *wisdom* must have its eye in all such manifestations of power: Whatever notice therefore we take of such dispensations, whilst God's design is unanswered, it leaves us under the brand and guilt of a contemptuous disregard. This is the case, when

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when we turn not to him that smites us ; when we are not brought to a more serious temper, from a loose, vain, and sensual mind ; when our convictions amount not to the making any stand, or any serious penitent reflection or enquiry, what we have done ; or when we go fowardly and stubbornly on in the way of our hearts. However we are struck and tremble at events felt or feared, they are not regarded in the divine account, till we cry unto God, and seek him with all our heart ; enquiring in earnest after the Lord our maker, humbling ourselves under his mighty hand, sensible of our desert of his indignation on the account of transgression, justifying him and condemning ourselves, doing our best for the removing the grounds of his controversy with us, by returning to our allegiance and duty. It is therefore a very great deception, but I fear a common one, to imagine that the purposes of heaven in its awful dispensations are answered, merely by our applying to God for the removing of his hand when it smites us ; by seeking to him for the continuance of blessings which are threatened to be removed, and for the obtaining those that are wanted, whilst withheld. All this there may be with a very sensual mind and a very stubborn heart : The grounds of the divine resentments may be still the same, the cry of iniquity may be still as loud, and we may be as destitute of hope, and as unworthy of help as ever. This fallacy, I think, is designedly exposed by the Prophet in the case of the people of *Israel*, of whom

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whom it is said, *They have not cried unto me with their hearts when they howled upon their beds : They assemble themselves for corn and wine, and they rebel against me* *. These words plainly refer to a time of trouble and distress, probably to an approaching dearth and famine : In this circumstance a general call and summons is issued out for a national application to heaven, as on a publick fast : But with what contempt and abhorrence is it here mentioned ? It is acknowledged they earnestly sought after God : But with what mind and disposition ? And to what end ? Was it from a sorrow and shame, from a contrition and grief of heart, for their offending God ? Was their sins the cause of their cries ? No : it was purely the apprehension of their sufferings : it was purely a regard to their plenty, and the love they had to their corn and wine : for the obtaining these they assembled. They were not the more willing to leave their sins, but unwilling to lose their mercies : They were not affected with their guilt, nor any more disposed to return to God ; they were only concerned to be stript of their blessings, and solicitous for their restoration. This drew from them those loud complaints ; and since they had no prospect of securing them from any other quarter, they put their wishes into a devotional form, not through choice, but as a last shift ; for under all, *they retained a rebellious mind.*

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* Hosea vii. 14.

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GOD's end in his visitations is plainly revealed: It is to testify against our sins, and to bring us to testify against them too as evil and bitter; it is to bring us back to his law, which is no other than the dictates of divine wisdom, and the demands of divine sovereignty. His design is to purge away iniquity, to mortify the habits of sin, to reclaim from the practice of it, and by the rectifying of our judgments to turn our feet to his testimonies. This is the fruit, the end, that he proposes *. In times of calamity from the alarms of providence we are led by a kind of *instinct* to prayer; and to be sure it is a considerable end of God's afflictive dispensations to brings us to it. But then we should remember, it is to bring us to *that* prayer, which through the divine promise shall remove the *cause* of such dispensations, which is the displeasure of God on the account of transgression: This no prayer can do but that of the *real penitent*, which is "the expression of an awakened conscience, deeply affected with the violation of its infinite obligations to God; and a sense of his dishonour; which evidences and promotes a change of the mind, and a turn of the heart from sin to God." All supplications and cries falling short of this, fall so much short of the end of the divine dispensations; and in the divine estimate are only the acts of the animal howling under the whip; or the disguise of the hypocrite, who covers the disaffection of the heart

* Isaiah xxvii. 9.

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heart and the rebellion of the life, with lying lips. This brings me to the

III. To justify the divine resentments here expressed against those of this character. Wherever they are annexed to any particular behaviour, we are sure it is intrinsically evil, and most hazardous to those to whom it belongs, from the offensiveness of it to God. That the woe annexed to the character in the text is not causeless, but most just, will I hope appear upon a serious attention to the following things.

1. CONSIDER, whose hand it is, and whose works they are, that are disregarded. They are the works of the *Lord*, they are the operation of *his* hands. Hear him described in sacred writ, and let the men of reason and philosophy, if they can, disprove.

“ He is the great, the Almighty, the terrible God; the Lord of hosts, whose armies
“ there is no numbering. Who is great in
“ counsel, mighty in working: Who doth what
“ he pleaseth in heaven, on earth, in the sea,
“ and *in all deep places*, even in the bowels of
“ the earth and the bottom of the sea: For in
“ his hand are the *deep places*, or the secret
“ parts, of the earth, the strength of the hills
“ is his also. He commandeth the sun and it
“ riseth not; he sealeth up the stars: He thundereth with the voice of his excellency under
“ the whole heaven, and directeth his lightnings to the ends of the earth. He turneth
“ the cloud round about by his counsel, that

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“ it

“ it may do what he commandeth upon the
“ face of the earth. He causeth the vapours to
“ ascend, and bringeth the wind out of his trea-
“ sury. The mountains quake at him, the
“ hills melt, the earth is burnt at his presence:
“ His fury is poured out like fire, and the
“ rocks are thrown down by him: At his wrath
“ the earth trembleth, and the nations are not
“ able to abide his indignation. This Lord sit-
“ teth king for ever: The hand of the Lord
“ doth all these things.” Now, since God by
his providence proclaims this his name, surely
we ought by our acknowledgments to declare
his praise: As all nature hath thus a God over
it; as all the desolating effects produced by any
parts or powers thereof, are claimed and chal-
lenged by him as *his* works, and the execution
of *his* pleasure, they merit and demand our
consideration. Do not such a presence, power,
agency, and dominion, carry an eternal reason
for our attention? Is there not a power and au-
thority accompanying the word and acts of this
great king to enforce them, and assuring us it is
at our peril to despise them? *Shall the trumpet*
be blown in the city as an alarm and summons
from the Almighty, *and we not hear or be*
afraid! *Shall the Lion roar* in our hearing, and
threaten us in a terrible manner *and shall we not*
tremble! *Fear ye not ME,* saith the Lord, *will*
ye not tremble at MY presence! Have you such
an affection as fear belonging to you, and hath
it any object for its exercise equal with myself?
Is there any thing in the world to call it forth,
and

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and justify it as a rational and wise act? And is not every call to it and reason for it included in my presence, power, and absolute dominion? In short: The incontestable agency and glorious greatness of this sovereign ruler, displayed and manifested in events, beyond measure aggravate our inconsiderate behaviour, fill it with guilt, and expose us to the demerit of the most daring and insolent contempt of the Almighty.

For,

2. Such a behaviour is absolutely inexcusable. How soon soever the impression of such alarms, as we are speaking of, may wear off, sure I am, they *at first* strike every witness thereto with a sense of a providence, and of a God concerned therein: The events naturally rouse and awaken the inwrought but overlaid conviction, and produce the thought. Who knoweth not, who confesseth not *to themselves* at least, that the hand of the Lord hath wrought them †. If we have a capacity then to discern the evidences of a providence, and are told *by our own minds*, that what we see and feel are such, we can never plead any thing that our consciences will admit to be valid as an excuse for our disregard, or in bar to a self-condemnation for it. Whatever darkness there may be upon any events, or how far soever the divine designs therein may be supposed to exceed our penetration, the evidence we have that what we see is the divine hand is a sufficient demand for our attention: And this our minds would natu-

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† Job xii. 9.

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rally pay thereto, were they not diverted, and their genuine workings stifled and suppressed— May I not further appeal to all, whether our own reason doth not tell us, that it is the *divine will* that we should observe the operations of his hand? Can we so much as doubt, if we will consult our own consciences, whether such dispensations are *intended* for our notice; whether they are messages to us from the Lord, for our warning and instruction; or speak not a language which we are capable of understanding and answering? Nothing can more clearly reveal the divine *design* than the declaration of the divine *expectation* with respect to *Jerusalem*: when referring them to other nations, who they knew were made monuments of justice, the Prophet as in the name of God subjoins, *I said, surely thou, O Jerusalem, wilt fear me; thou wilt receive instruction* †. It is delivered as the most natural consequence, and the most obvious suggestion that could arise in a reasonable mind, upon such desolating providences: as what natural conscience would have led them to, had it been admitted to speak, or had its dictates been followed.—May I not appeal once more: have we any thing of greater importance to attend to than such operations of the divine hand? we are agreed to judge of the moment of things by their relation to ourselves, and the degree of their influence upon our happiness. And doth any thing more immediately affect our interest than such dispensations of Providence, wherein God is plainly lifting up his hand

† Zeph. iii. 6, 7.

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hand; taking hold of vengeance; giving the loudest warnings and the most formidable signs and tokens of ruin? Signs they are that explain themselves; that require no prophet to reveal them; addressed to our common understanding; speaking to our senses, and distinguishing enough to declare an approaching, an incensed, God. Can we, if we have any modesty or reason left; say, that our employments and business, or our indulgences and pleasures, are of greater moment? or that we have no leisure for attending to the divine dispensations, from the demands that things of greater consequence have upon us? for should we not be ashamed to reply if we were asked, what those more concerning affairs were? what plea, what apology, can we make for our disregard?

3. THIS regardlessness of the divine dispensations is resolvable into the worst causes, and an evidence of the worst disposition. In proportion to the sense we have of God, is our sense of his providence: consequently, when, and as we lose the sense of a providence, that of a God is weak and languid: and under that circumstance, what branch of piety, what security for the virtues of the social and relative life, can be given. Nothing more immediately offers itself as the reason of a disregard of the divine hand, than a disbelief, or at least a strong *desire* of disbelieving a divine providence: which is resolvable into nothing, but a stupidity or sottishness, or an affected madness and folly. But, as bad a disposition of mind

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as this bespeaks, it cannot take place but by what heightens the guilt, *viz.* a perverseness and obstinacy of mind. Such have eyes to see the hand of God in his operations, but they *will* not perceive ; they have ears to hear, but they *will* not understand ; they have understandings to discern and know, but they *will* not acknowledge : they are studiously deaf, and obstinately blind. Thus the prophet resolves the case, *they will not behold the majesty of the Lord*, they will not attend to his awful greatness, though appearing most illustriously in the dispensations of his providence *. This will sufficiently account for the defeating the divine ends in such appearances, however obvious they be, or however affecting or awakening the means used for the accomplishing them may be. And at the same time represents a very forlorn and degenerate state of mind ; a mind void of every noble principle, of every great and sublime idea, and entirely under the power and direction of prejudice and passion. Since the providences of God come upon an errand of warning and instruction, to *prevent ruin* by exciting thought and reflection in order to a reformation, and are wisely and abundantly adapted to this end ; it is extremely disingenuous and ungrateful to withdraw our attention : such a return to such a benevolence, under such demerit too, argues a baseness that is invincible by every method that mercy could take to subdue it. It must be something *in ourselves* that stifles the evidences,

* Isaiah xxvi. 10.

dences, and makes them stand for nothing. And what other cause is assignable than a resolvedness for sense and sin ; a devotedness to fancy and frolick, to passion and appetite ; a consciousness they have run so deep in arrears of guilt that they can expect no favour from their maker, and a determination thereupon to admit of nothing that shall break in upon their security, or that should be an interruption to the prosecution of their pleasures. These are the reasons, and such as these, that *God speaketh once, yea twice*, and in the loudest and most affecting manner too, *but men perceive it not* ; that his hand is not seen where most conspicuous ; and that he is excluded from his own world.—Now, if we may judge of a behaviour from the principles it proceeds from, and the disposition it betrays, which I think is a just rule of estimating it ; a regardlessness of the divine dispensations is a very aggravated crime, and *merits* the consequences which we are bid to expect from the nature of the thing, and the resentments of God in his word, which is no less than *destruction* *. *Because they regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operations of his hand, he shall destroy them, and not build them up.*

THEY who believe a providence cannot but see and confess that the voice of the Lord crieth loudly to us, by the judicial dispensations under which we are at present, and have been for some years past, though they have been *diversified*,

* Psalm xxviii. 5.

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fied, for the more illustrious manifestation of the extent of the divine power, and in order to strike *some* passion of our minds, as one or another might prevail in our constitution. Our formidable apprehensions have been very lately excited by two very awful shocks of the earth, whereby from the loosening its foundations, or those of our habitations, the *hour*, the *moment*, seemed to be come, when not only our persons and possessions, but our city, was to be swallowed up, to be wiped away from the face of the earth, and the place thereof no more to be found. This indeed was, in a manner a *new* thing, *to us*: but have *we* not hereby *felt* a specimen of a providence that abundantly confirms the truth of those *past* facts, in all their awful circumstances, respecting the old world, with that of *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*, and of the power of that anger to which they are ascribed? and also that facilitates our belief of those *future* events, which the same truth hath engaged for, to be accomplished by the same power? who that *knows*, as *we now do*, that it can shake the very foundations of the earth for a prodigious space, in almost one and the same moment, and make those parts to tremble, that seem as immoveable as the great mountains.— Who I say, that know there is a power equal *to this*, can question the truth of what we are bid to *expect*, even a *deluge of fire*, when by the force of that one element, cities shall be laid in ruin and rubbish, the mountains and rocks shall be melted, all the varieties of nature, the works

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works of art, with the inhabitants of the earth, shall be blended and swallowed up. Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty!

THE general consternation that at one and the same instant ran through the city, is an open confession it was a just alarm, and merited regard in spite of men themselves: and what regard can the *man of reason* suggest that is any way suitable to the event, but what is of a *religious* kind? How could any one who *deserves* that character stop short of a power above them? evidencing itself to be Almighty, by an ability of destroying his own works, of unhinging the very frame of nature, of dissolving and breaking down those parts that seem to defy time itself. What ailed thee, O earth, that thou tremblest! ye buildings, that your foundations shook! was it the mere operation of natural causes? or was it not the Lord who gave the word; the disposing intelligence who ordained the event, and sent forth his command? such desolating strokes of which we have had portages, have ever been attributed to the *immediate* hand of God, and have been acknowledged the indications of his *displeasure*, not only by the wise and the reasonable, but also by the most degenerate and abandoned wretches, in other places and in former times. And if when they come to an *extremity*, or, as the prophet expresses it, when *they come* upon a people *in their perfection*, they merit that acknowledgment, doubtless the *lighter* strokes are imputable to no other cause, and are declarations of the

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same truth. But we, forsooth, are advised to govern our sentiments by, and to derive our security from philosophy: and we are very officiously directed again and again, by our news papers, to means for the hardning the heart and stupifying the mind, as our best preservative against the ground of our fears, and a most effectual charm against all dangers. If we do but understand the *immediate* causes of events, we seem to be told they cannot hurt us; and that if the causes do *at present exist*, if they are not created on purpose, the Almighty cannot employ or commission them as the executioners of his vengeance. These kind, benevolent, creatures, *in effect* advise us to dismiss our fears, and to go on as we begun: they will undertake for the consequences that no evil shall befall us, from *their* knowledge of what is in the *bowels* of the earth, and the power and manner of its operation. But if we apprehend danger from what is in the *earth*, we are bid to persuade ourselves that the cause was not in the *earth*, but *in the air*, if we like that better. So that as far as I can fee, our fears and dangers too arise from *providence*, or from our supposing a *God concerned* in such events: and if we can but divest our minds of such an apprehenfion, we are safe enough, and may be very easy. A glorious employment this of learning, if it be so called, and of time and pains too! how indebted is the city and suburbs to these genius's! these enemies to superstition! these men of courage, whom nothing can dismay; and who would enable

enable others to bid defiance to heaven and earth, if we would but regard them.

THAT any should stop and rise no higher than *immediate* and *visible* causes in their regard and estimate of events, is in sacred language a *belying the Lord*, and *saying it is not he, neither shall evil come upon us*, Jer. v. 12. Nay, whatever such may conceit, it is not for the *credit of their understandings*, nor the *least proof* of their *benevolence and love to mankind*. And in this we have the opinion and suffrage of the great *heathen orator*, who with respect to communities gives this advice to lawgivers. “ * Let the very first concern be to rivet this sentiment in the minds of the subjects, that all things are the property, and *under the goverment of the Gods*: and that whatever is done and executed, is managed and done by their *wisdom, by their will and pleasure*.—Minds, saith he, seasoned with these principles bid fair to promote the common benefit, and are in the possession of truth.”

BUT we have found out another goodly scheme, if we are not misinformed, as our security against a future shock; that is, a flying from providence by changing of place; or at least retiring beyond the reach of the mine. But alas! what can be proposed, much less promised, from such an expedient! is it come to this at last, that the true God, the living God, is *the God of the hills, and not of the vallies; or of the vallies, and not of the hills?* Is he li-

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* Cic. de Leg. p. 351. Bleau edit.

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mited and confined as to his presence, perception, or operation? however we may *wish*, can a reasonable creature ever bring itself to *believe*, *that it can flee out of his hand?* Is this philosophy too, or the effects of it, against which the common reason of mankind loudly reclaims? How wretchedly are these foolish hearts darkened! how vain are these imaginations! where these are the sentiments of a Divine Being, no wonder the worship only suits an idol.—In just abhorrence of such lenitives and opiates, which cannot possibly have any influence upon events, but to render them most certain, and more dreadful, let us, my friends, seriously attend [to the voice of providence, in the tremendous warning that hath given us, and make our most serious reflections upon our own personal iniquities and provocations, whereby we have contributed to the general ground and reason of such dispensations. Let our hearts meditate *terror*, *rather* than such a delusive peace. Let us *say*, or establish our minds in the persuasion, since we *see*, that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God: that it is *his wrath* that makes the nation tremble; and that it is an evil thing and bitter to depart from him. It is in the highest degree rational, as well as religious, and therefore this day let us make this solemn invitation to one another, this agreement amongst ourselves, “ let us now fear “ the Lord our God, for it is *be* that doth “ speak, behold it is he.”

AND oh how awful was the voice and the
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language too! It was not that of correction but destruction; not of reproof but ruin; not like mere visitation but vengeance. The Prophet describing an *utter extirpation*, and *sudden ruin* of a people, makes use of the figure of an earthquake: *The foundations of the earth shall be shaken, it shall be utterly broken down, or cleave; it shall reel too and fro.* Now what is it that shall thus shake what seems so firmly established? Why, it is this, the *transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it**. This is the load. And who that hath eyes or ears is not a witness of, who that hath any thing of a righteous soul but must lament, that variety and weight of insolent, unrebuked, impiety and licentiousness, those studied and laboured provocations of heaven by horrid oaths and imprecations, which good Bishop *Tillotson* says, “are enough, if we “were guilty of no other sins, to sink the nation: and this, as he observes, not only “among the tribe that wear liveries, but “amongst those who go before them, and “should give better examples.” But what is the weight of guilt upon this land? To what a load doth it amount? when the several other, as prevailing, vices, carrying in their very face, and in the impudence with which they are committed and defended, the utmost defiance of heaven, are taken into the account. What can be expected by any thinking person, but that this *talent of lead*, as the Prophet stiles such wickedness, should sink our land as suddenly and irre-

* Isaiah xxiv. 19, 20.

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irretrievably, as no greater a burden hath done others; who, when as flourishing, secure, and gay as ourselves, have in a few moments disappeared, and *by thousands* have gone down quick, at once, and alive, into the pit? If ever God doth visit, should he not visit for such things as we are chargeable with? If ever he proceed to extremity, will it not be for such sins as are amongst us, and which are abundantly aggravated by their being *ours*?

NEVER was the divine unwillingness to destroy a people expressed more strongly *by facts*, since those most moving words were delivered to the *Jews*, than hath been expressed by the divine dispensations towards us: *How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee up, O Israel! How shall I prevail with myself to make thee as Admah! How shall I set thee as Zeboim!* Cities that I destroyed by fire from heaven *. Here is a plain declaration of their desert of an utter and irrecoverable overthrow from the divine anger, which other cities had experienced: but, after the manner of men, there is a representation of a struggle in the divine mind, to express God's unwillingness to destroy them, and his readiness to give the victory and triumph to mercy. Was not this the very language of providence to us in the circumstances attending our late repeated alarms? Since they were *but threatenings* of a very sudden, general, and overwhelming ruin: but *such threatenings*, as seemed to rise to the utmost height they

* Hosea xi. 8.

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they could do, short of an execution. We were very sensibly taught thereby, and compelled to acknowledge, the mighty power of God: And at the same time had an equal demonstration that *mercy belongeth unto God*, and that mercy pleaseth him. Is not this very circumstance an *additional* demand upon us for the most grateful and affectionate regard of his hand? Would common ingenuity bear the abuse and perversion of the mercy to a contempt of the divine power? Things are brought to a very deplorable state and crisis indeed, when nothing *but executions* will open our eyes, rouze us out of our stupidity, and convince us of the presence, power, providence, and dominion of an holy and invisible ruler over us, or that we and what we call *ours*, are absolutely in his hand.

LET any one in their senses say, whether the hand that manifested itself so far and wrought what it did, so much beyond what we had any conception of before, could not have proceeded to the utmost stretch of our fears: or whether he who shook the earth under us, could not have opened its mouth, and enclosed us in it. *From heaven hath he made us to hear his voice, that he might instruct us,* both as to the extent of his own power, that his eyes are upon all our ways, and that our demerit is ruin, *by his shaking terribly the earth.* Oh! that our Jerusalem might be instructed, least if what we have known prove ineffectual, he should think his own honour and glory concerned to proceed so far

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far with us as to render us desolate, *a land not inhabited*. How *speedy* may be the decision of that controversy which depends on the almighty power of God! How *dreadful* must that be which is grounded on the daring contempt and insolent impiety of man! If in case of disregard of the divine judgments, God will, as he hath bid us to expect he will, punish *seven times more*, it is undeniable that sins after such judgments are seven times aggravated. Should he proceed with us to our absolute overthrow in the way that we are apprehensive of at present, we could not say we were *surprized* into it. No: let every ones conscience witness for God, that he told us what was coming, what arrow he had taken out of his quiver; that he warned very loudly before he struck, and that it was to *prevent* the fatal blow. Who have we to accuse, if we treat him as one that mocked or jeested with us?

IT hath greatly affected my own mind, from the knowledge I have of humane nature, and the discoveries made of another state, to contemplate the *inexpressible surprize* into eternity that the execution had been to multitudes. Oh! the horror that would have attended their exit, who would have gone down into the pit with all their sins reeking about them! taken *in arms* against the almighty! but the minute before probably daring their maker, challenging his curse, and bidding defiance to his justice, and the next, becoming sensibly a victim to it! As they sunk, configning *themselves* to ever-

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everlasting perdition ! I wonder not that the terrible image should haunt them : that the sinners in *Zion* should be at their wits ends ; that fearfulness should surprize the hypocrite : It is the most natural effect of their course : and where it is not found, it is not from fortitude, but stupidity.

I HOPE I speak to none whom such a representation would have described : but to an assembly who truly lament the abominations under which the land groans ; who from their regards to, have an interest in, the great ruler of the world ; and are employing that interest in the best manner as intercessors for those of your fellow-creatures, who of all others are the greatest objects of compassion, from the dreadful war and controversy they have commenced with the almighty. Permit me with great earnestness to entreat you, seriously to lay to heart the awful operations of the divine hand you have lately been witnesses too, and cherish the impressions that you have found from them. The tremendous facts were wrought that they might be *remembred* : And then are they *well remembred*, when they are improved "as calls to enter into the secret chamber for humble and fervent prayer ; for giving glory to the Lord our God by the acknowledgment of our sins and desert of punishment ; for the establishing our faith in the perfections and providence of God with our absolute dependence thereon ; and for the inspiring our zeal in the promoting personal, family, and, so far, a general reformation, to the utmost of our ability and influence." This is

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the design and language of the most alarming providences: nothing short of this will testify the regard that the specimens of the divine justice, and the *intercessions of mercy*, if I may so speak, demand from a *visited* but *spared* people; nor will any thing but this prevent the overwhelming calamities we are apprehensive of.

It is true: we can *absolutely* answer for none but *ourselves*: but as this is within our power, under the influences of divine grace, let us *each* regard *one*. This, when proceeding from a principle of conscience towards God, will not only inspire a tenderness and fidelity for the discharging the relations of parents and heads of families, but will singularly inforce instruction, and reconcile others to proper checks and restraints. But if after all that we can do, the *righteous soul* should be grieved from day to day, with the unrighteous deeds of others, and with their contempt and disregard of the most high God, let us improve our grief by the heightning of our own devotion, the promoting the greater circumspection in our conduct, and imparting a vigor to, and a consistency between, our own prayers, resolutions, and endeavours. Then, who can tell what God may do for the sake of a remnant! He may, as he hath done, admit them to the honour of standing in the gap, at which destruction was entering; and of being successful intercessors for the turning away his wrath. And whatever the politician or the philosopher may imagine, the *Government*, nay, the *world*, subsists upon the account, and for the sake of the *righteous few*,

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few, that are to be found amongst every denomination of Christians—— But if the divine honour should require the proceeding to extremity, to the compleating the tragedy, yet the hope is not altogether groundless nor presumptive, “ that the destroying angel may have a “ commission to pass over our houses, and “ that they may be distinguished in, what may “ be stiled a *common ruin*: we may be hid in “ the day of the Lord’s anger”—— But, *however that be*, the righteous are safe: For tho’ they may be involved with others in the manner of leaving the world, they shall be eternally distinguished from them.

BECAUSE the sentence, which we justly apprehended to be past upon us, is not yet executed, *when* and in the *manner* that *we* fondly and foolishly determined, let us not as fondly conclude that *the bitterness of death is past*: nor because, through the great mercy and forbearance of heaven, the divine controversy with us is not yet decided by the judgment awarded against us, let us not insolently say with the scoffers of old, *Where is the promise of his coming?* By such a return, the measure of our iniquity will fill apace, we shall provoke God *to hasten his work*, and our own mouths will declare that nothing but destruction is left as a means of our conviction. Depend upon it, if when the divine hand is *lifted up we will not see it*, we shall be made to see it by what we *feel*: for sooner or later God will be regarded, and he that rules and judges in the earth will overcome.

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SINCE the text assures us, and our growing experience confirms it, that such a devotedness to pleasure as at present reigns both amongst high and low, is the bane of every thing serious and *manly*, introducing the greatest insolence as to vice, and the greatest stupidity as to warnings, till judgments overwhelm them, let us unanimously agree to *enter our protest*, and to the utmost of our power to *discourage* "those schools of idleness, effeminacy, and vice; those poisoners of the mind; those dissolvents of virtuous resolutions; those arts for the suppressing of modesty, and the spreading a depravation of manners by the spoils of unguarded innocence:" to the wretched influences of which we may in a good measure ascribe our late direful threatenings, if sins are the cause of judgments. I would hope this maybe thought worthy of *publick cognizance — and in time too*; that the drops that have fell may not be followed by a storm. But if things must go on as they have a long time done, to the further encrease of our guilt and danger; if countenance and a sanction shall still be given to every opened sluice tending to an inundation of immorality and misery; by the silence of those who may and should exclaim, and by the supports of those who should know better; may we who are here present be prepared to meet an appearing God, and extract a joy from an interest in him, when the fear of the wicked shall come upon them: being assured of this, that how awfully soever God may display himself to the land in general, *it shall be well with them that fear him, that always fear before him.*

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